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Gadhafi Helps Gain Release Of Belgian Held in Lebanon

By Nora Boustany
Washington Post Foreign Service

BEIRUT, June 15—A Belgian physician taken hostage over a year ago in southern Lebanon was freed unharmed in Sidon this afternoon and taken to Damascus amid reports that Belgium may have struck a deal by promising to unfreeze trade contracts with Libya.

Jan Cools, 32, a general practitioner working for Norwac, the Norwegian Aid Committee, was seized at gunpoint on May 21, 1988, after leaving the Rashidiyeh Palestinian refugee camp in southern Lebanon.

Members of the Fatah Revolutionary Council, a radical Palestinian group led by Abu Nidal, were instrumental in his release despite repeated denials they were involved in his abduction. An obscure group calling itself Soldiers of the Truth announced yesterday that it would free him in response to an appeal by Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi.

Cools, who told reporters he was treated reasonably well by his captors, specifically thanked Gadhafi for helping gain his release.

Belgian Foreign Trade Minister Robert Urbain traveled to Sidon with Belgian diplomats based here to receive the released hostage at the home of Mustafa Saad, a leading Sidon Sunni Moslem politician.

Belgian Foreign Minister Leo Tindemans, apparently circumvented in the negotiations leading to the alleged Libyan-Belgian arrangement, suggested in Brussels that Urbain may have reached a deal with Gadhafi that would violate sanctions imposed against Libya three years ago by the European Community. Last March, Tindemans had gone to Syria but failed to secure Cools' freedom.

Urbain flew to Damascus, Syria, today after being telephoned in Brussels by the Libyans and then went to Lebanon to meet Cools, a Foreign Trade Ministry spokesman said in Tripoli, Libya.



REUTERS

Cools, center, hugs a friend after his release as Belgian official wipes tears.

In an interview today in the daily *La Libre Belgique*, Tindemans said Urbain went to Libya "without any mandate by the Belgian government on the question of hostages and without consulting me."

Reporters who saw Cools said he appeared fresh and well-fed when he arrived to a tearful reunion with friends and an emotional embrace with the trade minister. Cools' parents flew to Damascus to meet him.

A spokesman for Urbain said that in Tripoli, Gadhafi had expressed wishes for boosting trade links with Belgium and had pledged to consider the issue of Belgian hostages held in the Middle East, Reuter reported from Brussels.

The spokesman added that Urbain promised to unfreeze Belgian contracts in Libya worth \$60 million that had been delayed for "technical reasons."



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